



Tribal livelihoods and tribal development: An understanding of Odisha

Sudhansu Sekhar Sahoo

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Sambalpur University, Odisha, India

Abstract

Tribes in India, is considered as the most disadvantaged group. Water, Land, and Forest are the major sources of the livelihoods of tribal population. The development of tribal is based on the enjoyment of their forest rights. Without the forest, the livelihoods of the tribes will be in jeopardy. Without forest, we cannot ensure their forest rights. The first need is to keep forest. In order to lead a dignify life; it is vital that tribal community should get their “prescribed rights in the forest rights act, 2006 and also should effectively enjoy it”. The development of the tribal needs effective concern from the state and its various institutions. The concept of development should go with theoretical and practical correctness.

Keywords: Livelihoods, forest rights, tribal community, development, disadvantaged group

Introduction

The ‘inalienable right to dignify life’ is the lifeblood of every human being. The constitution of India has also recognised our right to life with dignity. The people, who are belonging from the disadvantaged sections of the society are always confronting with challenges towards their ‘right to dignify life’. Tribes are one among them. The livelihoods of tribal people are based on the practice of subsistence and sustainability. In one sense, it can perhaps be said that tribes as the ‘social ecologists’: tribal people’s economic conditions of existence are rooted in both subsistence and conservation ethics ^[1]. The identity of tribal community depends on the enjoyment of their forest rights. According to the Census 2011, the population of tribes in India is 10.42 Crores which is 8.6% of total population of India. There are over 730 Scheduled Tribes notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India ^[2]. In 2001 Census, the population of tribes was 8.43 Crores, which was 8.2% of total population in India ^[3]. There is no Scheduled Tribes Population in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, & Puducherry ^[4]. The population share of tribes shows that how it is essential to take various effective steps for strengthening tribal rights, especially forest rights and it will ultimately conserve their (Adivasis’s) livelihoods. From the very long history, especially from the time of Colonial period in India, tribal community has been engaged themselves with many struggles for the protection of their customary rights over forests and lands. In other words, we can say that the history of tribes is the history of injustice, exploitation, and being alienated from their lands and forests. In the name of Development, which is ambiguous concept, there are constant threats to the livelihoods of the indigenous people in India. Many countries in the world are in process to become capitalist country by giving free hands to the market economy without taking any consideration of the problems the environment & the world. The concept of development should not restrict itself with economic importance. The purpose of development should be holistic in nature. The aim of development should be to create better milieu for the humans, not to destroy the humans’ reason to live. According to the Amartya Sen, Development means freedom. To him, “development is the process of expanding human freedom. It is the enhancements of the freedom that

allow people to lead lives that they have reasoned to live. Development is enhanced by democracy and the protection of human rights” ^[5]. Therefore, the process of development should go with justice to everyone i.e. the victims of this process. What Utilitarian view is ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’, the present development is like ‘greatest happiness of the less number, and greatest sufferings of the greatest number’. The concept of tribal development must be both i.e. normative and descriptive in nature. When normative view of tribal development rests on the exercise of ‘unrestricted exercise of their forest rights’, the descriptive concept of tribal development based on the their literacy, health, employment, income etc.

Review of Literature

Ishan Kurketi (2022) has discussed the increasing rate of wrongful rejection of claims of people for their forest rights. It is because many mining activities, the land rights of tribes have been in danger. He has taken some respondents from the tribal district of Odisha, who are the real victims of the rejecting claims, mainly during the time covid. Biswadaya Pradhan (2013) has focused on the importance of the PESA act for the tribes in a comprehensive manner. Though the provision of 73rd and 74th came with uncountable applauses, it is still struggling with the ‘threat of power from privileged communities. And in the case of tribal areas, many dominant non-tribal people are controlling the panchayats. Anshuman Sahoo (2016) has given a clear understanding of the real meaning of development universally. Distributions of benefits of rights and ensuring the rights aren’t the same thing. The Author has compared the Forest Rights Act and Joint Forest Management and clearly defined that the Forest Rights Act is not an option but a great necessity. Indrani Sigamany (2015) highlights the theory and practice of the concept of ‘Access to justice’, which is defined by the United Nations development programme. It would not be wrong to say that many legislations are still relevant in theory but less effective in practice. Here the Author has discussed the problem that the indigenous people have been facing because of displacement due to land conservation and the speedy development of industries in forest lands. She has carefully brought the normative framework for land rights and human rights.

Methodology

This study is mostly theoretical and analytical in nature. The resources for this study have been collected from secondary resources, official data, and news reports and also from NGO report.

Tribes in Odisha

Odisha is one of the Fifth- Scheduled Areas which has comprised of 10 states in India. As per the data of 2011 Census of India, tribal population in Odisha constitute 22.85% out of total population in Odisha. And its share of contribution is 9.17% to the total tribal population of India [6]. Odisha is one of the important places of abode of tribal population. With 62 types of tribal communities, 13 PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) are sharing the territory of Odisha. Recently, the Parliament of India has passed the Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2024, in respect of Odisha on 8th February, 2024. The aim of the bill is that – to amend the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950, and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950 in order to modify the list of scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in relation to Odisha [7]. There is a greater possibility that some new tribal community will come under the list of Scheduled Tribes of Odisha. With this there is also a question, whether any earlier tribal community will remove from the list or all the 62 tribal community will remain static. The Scheduled Areas of Odisha comprise with 13 districts and 119 blocks where 55% of the total tribal population are living [8]. The major tribal community of Odisha, in terms of their numerical strength, are- Kondh, Gond, Santhal, Saora, Bhuiyan, Paraja etc. Along with this name, other tribes are there like- Baiga, Birhor, Ghara, Mankiridia, Khaira etc [9]. Each tribal community has their own cultural boundaries. And each one is unique than other tribes in case of dance, language, folk music and festivals with other diverse activities.

Tribal Livelihoods in Odisha

Before we think, we must eat. This is the main point of discussion between Hegel's thought and Karl Marx's thought. Means, when Hegel was giving importance to Ideas, at the same time Karl Marx was emphasising on Material world. It shows the importance of material life than other. Here, the vital point is, the livelihoods of every human being are depending on different sources in order to lead their life. The livelihoods pattern of tribal is very essential to notice. Jal, Jangal, and Jamin are the essential sources of tribal livelihoods and also crucial for tribal identity. Verrier Elwin has rightly said "In other parts of India, where the tribal communities have declined in many ways, the first cause of their depression was the loss of their land and forests" [10].

1. Land

Land is one of the most major requirements for sustaining the livelihoods of tribal community. In this neo-liberalism era, states are now in very much hurry to give lands to the corporate sector for mining and various industry projects. From the time British period to till now, the process of land alienation of tribal people has been continuing. The perspectives of looking towards the land resources are much different of tribes than us. We can see the vitality of lands for tribes from some cases of rebellions against the

authority. Like, "The Kol insurrection of 1833 was caused by encroachment on tribal land. The Tamar rebellions, repeated seven times between 1789 and 1832, were primarily due to the illegal deprivation of their rights in land which Hos, Mundas and Utaons had suffered" [11]. As per the one report published October, 2022 that 'around 5000 members of Adivasis Community of Odisha's sundargarh District surrounded the office of the district collector on October 21 to protest against what they claimed was the illegal acquisition of their land by the Dalmia Cement Company' [12]. "According to a draft report of Comptroller of India (CAG) that –land held by tribals in Odisha has decreased by 12% in a decade (2005-2015) while land belonging to Scheduled Caste has recorded growth in the same period" [13]. The point of discussion is that land, for the adivasis, is the very source of their livelihoods. The process of decreasing land holdings of tribal people will make them landless labourers.

2. Forest

Forest is another source of secured life of tribals. There is a symbiotic relationship between tribes and forest. 'Adivasis are not only living in forest, but also they are living with forest'. This is the main point when we are talking about the relationship between tribes and forest. Forest is the mother of tribal people. Various protests movements of the tribes, in some areas of India or in particularly in Odisha, has louded their voices in order to protect their mother (forest) from external forces. The relationship of tribes with forest is not based on ownership, but it is based on the principle of belongingness. According to a report published in 2020, "The state's (Odisha) forest cover around 37% of its topography. At least 32,711 villages are eligible for the recognition of their rights to community forest resources (CFR) as they have forest lands within their revenue village boundaries. According to an assessment by conducted the US- based Rights and Resources Initiatives, 2017 that there is very great negligence regarding the implementation of Community Forest Resources rights of tribes over forest. Just 3% of the area under CFR has been settled through the award of legal title deeds between 2006 and 2017" [14]. 2006, was a very great year for adivasis, that the historical in nature, the Forest Rights Act or The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Rights) Act got enacted and came into force in 2008. "Nearly 19,200 hectares forest land diverted nationally for mining between 2017-2022, about 8,000 hectares was from Odisha" [15]. The point is when we are trying to divert forest lands for the non-forestry use, it creates insecurity for the adivasis who are the major victims of the process of displacement. Cutting down forest or Diverting forest lands, where tribal population are living, refers to the destruction of the source of their (tribes) existence.

3. Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)

Non-Timber Forest Products are another source of secured livelihoods of the tribes. Every year, India receives Rs 20,000 Crore's worth of minor forest products and non-timber forest products [16]. There is no clear definition regarding the term of NTFPs. Many state governments are also not sure about the term of NTFPs or Minor Forest Products (MFP). In actual sense, the products which are minor in sense, are major for the adivasis. These products are vital for the tribes in particular, and for the layman in

general. In Odisha, some important NTFPs are Bamboo, Kendu leaf, sal seed, Mahua flower and seed, Siali leaf, Honey Lac etc. NTFPs are the more important source of security particularly food security and economic security of the tribal population. In most of the forest areas, where tribal community are living, these forest products have been supporting tribal for more than 6-8 months a year both in terms of subsistence and cash income [17]. Adivasi community are practising subsistence economy. They are collecting these non timber products for mostly for their consumption purpose, not for selling in market. But, there is also problems regarding the market environment for the selling of these products. These NTFPs products also help the community to exercise their barter system, which is still exist in tribal community.

Except these sources of livelihoods, hunting, shifting cultivation, agriculture, artisan etc are also playing major role in case of giving livelihoods security to tribal.

Tribal Livelihoods and Tribal Development

The economy and livelihoods of tribal population is closely linked with nature. In other words, it can be said that adivasi and nature are dependent on each other in equal manner. In one hand adivasi are the most important protector of biodiversity and developed well concept of sustainable use of nature and in other hand nature is dependent on indigenous people for its well management. In a study on traditional economic activities pursued by the tribes in India, Vidyarthi and Roy, have delineated the following categories [18]

1. Hunting
2. Hill-Cultivation
3. Plain agriculture
4. Simple artisan
5. Pastoral and cattle-herding
6. Folk artists and,
7. Agricultural and non-agricultural labourer

As we can see, the traditional economy of tribes are the mixing of many economic activities. In today's reality the livelihoods of adivasi is also the mix of all the enjoyment of their customary land and forest rights along with their participation in various government and private sector services. As mentioned above, the development of tribes needs more their rights-oriented perspective with their proportion in education, health, income, employment, sector of our state. With the coming of neo liberal perspectives of looking at development of a country, this perspective has put the livelihoods pattern of adivasi in danger. It is not possible to bring development for adivasi by alienating them from their forest and land. Means, the protection of their livelihoods sources will excel their development in theoretical terms. We need both, theoretical and descriptive concept of development. But, the need is to strong the structure of the natural rights of the tribes. We cannot ensure forest rights of the forest dwellers by selling the forests for the use of industry and mining and for other private interest based projects. Means, Forest is necessary for the forest rights and Land is necessary for the land rights of the tribes. Since the independence of India, because of the execution of various projects more than 22 lakhs acres of forest lands have been acquired [19]. "On the basis of vital official statistics, scholars have estimated that the total number of families displaced and the amount of land alienated during

1950-1990 from major and medium dams, mining projects, thermal power plants and industries in Odisha to be 81,176 households and 622,463.94 hectares of land" [20]. Displacement of tribes is another source of insecurity of tribal livelihoods in Odisha in particular and in India general. Two things are demanding important consideration that, first the state is not actually ensuring the individual and community forest rights of tribal in real sense and second with this ambiguous concept of development, the displacement has been occurring in which majority of victims are tribes. The point of concern is development should be people centric, not private interest oriented. And tribal development needs to be discussed from their forest and land rights perspectives.

Conclusion

Our late president K. R. Narayanan, once said that- "Let it not be said by future generations that the Indian Republic has been built on the destruction of green earth and the innocent tribals who are living here for generations" [21]. Tribal development refers to both – the effective enjoyment of the their rights on jal, jangal, jamin and the development of tribal population in the sectors of education, health, employment, income etc. Despite the two powerful acts PESA (Panchayats Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 and The Forest Rights Act -The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act), 2006, there is still no complete guarantee of the exercise of the natural rights of tribes. It is also very necessary to see the rate development of tribal members in other sector of society. It has been rights said that –tribes are not poor. They are disinherited from their property. State's response towards tribes is that –now the owners of lands are becoming land labourers. It is now very essential to give high attention towards this most disadvantaged group of Indian sub continent. Our duty should always be 'a protector of earth'.

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